

GUM SPRINGS RECREATION AREA
Kisatchie National Forest
12312 US Highway 84 West
Winnfield vicinity
Winn Parish
Louisiana

HALS LA-9
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

GUM SPRINGS RECREATION AREA (Gum Springs Picnic Site)

HALS NO. LA-9

Location: 12312 US HWY 84 W, Kisatchie National Forest (Approximately 8 miles west of Winnfield, Winn Parish, Louisiana)

Township 11 North, Range 4 West, Winn Parish, Louisiana

Winn Ranger District, Kisatchie National Forest

31.899, -92.780 (Center of main visitor parking lot at Gum Springs Recreation Area, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: Gum Springs Recreation Area is a rare extant example of Civilian Conservation Corps improvement projects within the State of Louisiana. Indicative of a landscape thoughtfully designed to harmonize with the existing environment, Gum Springs is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Description: Today's Gum Springs Recreation Area straddles US Highway 84 between Winnfield and Clarence, Louisiana, and consists of a day-use area, overnight camping sites and a popular horse trail, as well as the headquarters of the Winn Ranger District of the Kisatchie National Forest. The original portions of the site as developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps include the day-use area, or picnic site, and several hundred yards to the west a fire tower. The tower is listed on the National Historic Lookout Register. The camping sites, located south of the picnic area, and the equestrian facilities, across the highway to the north of the site, are part of ongoing development beginning in the late 1950's. The ranger station today includes a visitor's center with offices, storage sheds, fenced yards and a small wood framed residence that possibly dates to the CCC era.

The primary geographic feature of the picnic site is a natural ridge, facing east. The top of ridge is at an elevation of 315 feet sloping down to 250 feet. This 65 feet grade change creates the effect of a three-sided bowl that originally contained several freshwater springs. With a slope gradient between 20 and 40 percent, this natural feature was a distinctive landform for the region, if not the entire state. Prior to its cultural development, at the base of the ridge was a natural wetland, an upland shrub bog or *pocosin*, fed by the springs.

The picnic site is densely wooded with a mix of broadleaf deciduous and needleleaf evergreen trees. A distinct variation in the vegetation of the site can be observed across its dramatic grade change. The upper range and much of the slope is predominately pines with a mix of several species of oaks and a mostly

open understory. At the lower regions of the site around the pool, there are fewer pines and more broadleaf trees, both deciduous and evergreen. Particularly evident is the increased density and diversity in the understory at the lower realm. The canopy includes a greater variety of oak species, sweetgums and winged elm, with only a few pines. A distinct understory is comprised of dogwood, magnolia, bay laurel and red maple. At the ground level is a layer of both shrubs and groundcover. Included in the mix of shrubs are sassafras and bottlebrush buckeye. There is a fine stand of ferns at the base of one of the picnic sites sloping down to the water's edge. Unfortunately, the density of low level flora, including numerous vine species, has obscured many of the historic site features, contributing to a general appearance of disuse.

Gum Springs Recreation Area was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010. Approximately 10 acres of the site were selected for designation as an historic place worthy of preservation. A total of 57 contributing and 6 non-contributing resources were identified within the boundaries. The contributing features include the CCC era constructed swimming pool, erosion control terraces, picnic shelters, sandstone retaining walls and staircases, and outdoor fireplaces. For the distinctive stonework at the site, workers used ferruginous sandstone, typically found in rock outcroppings in this region of the state. Key features of the site considered to be non-contributing elements include the diving dock ruins and the earthen dam. The existing piers in the pool may be the original structure supporting the dock, but no horizontal plank surface now exists. In 1968 the water quality of the half-acre swimming pool was determined unhealthy and subsequently drained. A restoration of the site in 2006 included the addition of a pump to supply sufficient water, reconstruction of the earthen dam and the addition of an 11-acre lake below. While the character of the original swimming facility is fully intact, the alterations to the dam have resulted in its consideration as a non-contributing element.

A comparison of the photographs of the site included in the application of Gum Springs for the National Register to those taken for this survey would indicate some deterioration of the site. As noted earlier, overgrown groundcover is obscuring some of the historic structures. It is also restricting access to parts of the site, particular adjacent to the water's edge. A large tree has fallen across the earthen dam and tree debris litters the site. There is presently no sign of the CCC era benches listed in the National Register survey. One of the historic sandstone staircases is barricaded from use due to a loss of structural integrity.

A renovation of the site begun in 1957 resulted in the addition of a more extensive network of concrete stairs down the sloping site. Much of the surface of the sandstone stairs has been coated in troweled concrete, likely in an effort to preserve their function and prevent further deterioration. Fortunately, the majority of sandstone retaining walls supporting the two hexagonal shelters and the open picnic sites remain intact. Despite the impact of a challenging climate, a

lack of ongoing maintenance and a reduction in its use, Gum Springs Recreation Area retains its distinctive landform, sensitive cultural site features and value as a historic American landscape.

History: Gum Springs Recreation Area is located in the Kisatchie National Forest, created in 1936 by the executive order of President Franklin Roosevelt. Assemblage of the acreage that was to become Kistachie began in 1929, with a total of 412,845 acres purchased in four separate districts by the time its designation as Kisatchie. Most of the land was sold by lumber companies anxious to unload their property after clearing it of timber. By 1942 when land purchasing was discontinued, the federally owned forest consisted of 531,351 acres. The original four districts - Evangeline, Catahoula, Winn and Kistachie – became the first non-contiguous National Forest. In 1959, the Caney District in the northern part of the state was added bringing the Forest's total land area to 604,000 acres.

The name, Kisatchie, is derived from the Caddoan Indian Culture word for the “long cane” typical of the rolling forested landscape of North Central Louisiana. Forest Service archaeologists have identified evidence of prehistoric use of the Gum Springs site, but no formal effort has been conducted to verify this assessment. The use of the word Kisatchie to identify the region was popularized by influential teacher, horticulturist and environmental activist, Caroline Dormon, who often made reference to her “Kisatchie Wold.”

Until late in the 19th Century, as much as 85% of the Louisiana landscape remained virgin forest. Beginning in the late 1880's with the extension of the railroads throughout much of the South, vast acres of land were purchased for their timber resources. Over the next forty years timber companies opened sawmills adjacent to existing rail lines or new lines constructed for the sole purpose of harvesting timber. Small towns grew around the mills that operated until all the trees were cut, remaining only 15 to 20 years, before moving on to the next old growth stand. This industrial mining of the forest, sometimes referred to as “cut out and get,” had a devastating impact on the landscape and to many of those who considered it home.

Two people in particular made a significant contribution to the development of conservation practices in the State of Louisiana and the development of Kisatchie National Forest. Louisiana native Henry Hardtner was owner of Urania Lumber Company located in the central part of the state, about 20 miles east of Winnfield. His observations of the native forests and practices of timber harvesting led him to understand the value of reforestation. Upon establishment of the federal Forest Service in 1905, Hardtner was in communication with its leadership about this idea of forest conservation to maintain a supply of lumber over time. In 1909 and 1910 members of the forest service visited Urania Forest to observe the management practices Hardtner was developing. For thirty years beginning in 1913 Urania was the field study site of the Yale Forestry School.

These efforts led to the establishment by the Forest Service of the Southern Forest Experiment Station in Louisiana.

The second person playing a key role in the history of the Kisatchie Forest is Caroline Dormon, whose home, Briarwood, is located within the National Forest near Saline, Louisiana. It is now a foundation open to the public and dedicated to educational purposes in conservation. As a child she developed a keen interest in plants and wildlife and experienced the impact of the timber industry on the environment around her. Beginning around 1918 when Dormon returned to her family home at Briarwood, the 20-year-old schoolteacher began a massive letter writing campaign in an attempt to preserve a virgin stand of the Louisiana forest. Her efforts were in vain. Within a few years the entire forest had been cleared. However, her appointment in 1921 as a public relations representative for the Louisiana Forestry Department provided a platform from which to develop momentum for the establishment of a national forest within the state. Working with a local member of US Congress, Dormon was able to influence the Hoover administration to purchase the first unit of land that was to become Kisatchie National Forest.

Gum Springs is one of three public recreation areas developed within Kisatchie. The original portion of Gum Springs - the picnic site and swimming pool - was constructed by the workers of CCC Camp F6, located about a mile north of Calvin, Louisiana. Company 277 built the camp in 1934 before being transferred to California. Organized with 200 enrollees from Georgia, Company 5407 was stationed at Camp F6 beginning in 1937. Project work assigned to the company included building forest roads, fencing of timber plantations, fighting fire, establishing fire breaks, building telephone lines and planting pine seedlings. Company 5407 was responsible for the planting of 5.6 million tree seedlings between the years of 1938 and 1939.

A “spike camp” housing 37 workers was set up at Gum Springs with the task of constructing the new recreation facility. The site was selected because of clear evidence of its popularity with local residents for picnics and other outdoor activities. The site’s topography would also have contributed to the preservation its original woodland character because of the challenges it posed to harvesting timber. Work on the site commenced in 1939 and continued through at least 1941. In addition to the picnic area, work included erection of the fire tower in the area that was likely the location of the camp.

Surveys of the site and plans for its development were completed by April 1938. Landscape architects J.C. Jackson, Hugh K. Harris and C. Joe Galloway were responsible for the plans and contributed to its design during construction. The recreation area first opened to the public in 1940 and remained a popular site for people of the region, particularly students attending Northwest State College in Natchitoches. The peak of its popularity was in the mid-1960’s when as many as

440 carloads of visitors were counted over a 4th of July weekend. Such popularity, along with a reduction of water flow from the springs, contributed to the deterioration of the swimming pool's water quality, resulting in its closure in 1968.

Almost twenty years after its initial construction, Gum Springs Recreation Area underwent a major alteration. Beginning in 1957 work commenced to better handle increased visitor traffic and to reduce maintenance costs. These improvements included the addition of wood to reinforce the masonry edges of the swimming pool, resurfacing the pool's bottom and re-decking of the diving docks. The rubble masonry staircases were expanded and possibly replaced with poured cement, electrical hook-ups were placed around the site and a road to the north of the swimming pool was added. The original bathhouses were removed and rebuilt out of cinder block. Most of this work did not take into account the character of the original materials, resulting in some damage to its value as a cultural resource.

Following the closure of the swimming facilities, a camping area was developed to the south of the picnic area. At this time the original facility entered a period of benign neglect due to lack of use and funding for necessary maintenance. In 1991 a Cultural Resources Management Summary identified the site as a valuable part of Louisiana history. At that time, the Forest Service removed some of the more offending elements that had been added to the site, including the latrines and reconstructed bathhouses. In May 2003, staff from the Kisatchie National Forest with help from local volunteers erected a monument at Gum Springs commemorating the construction and reforestation work of the men of CCC Company 5407. It consists of a simple bronze plaque set in a base of large boulders of the ferruginous sandstone originally used at the site.

In 2006 the swimming pool was reconstructed with the addition of a pump to provide a steady flow of water and repairs to its earthen dam. While following its original configuration, the condition of the pool's edges and growth of plants both within and around its perimeter keep it from being an inviting place to swim. However, the reconstructed pool remains a charming water feature and the focus of the site. Below the earthen dam was added a much larger reservoir. Though not part of the original scheme, it does not diminish the value of the site's historic features. Also built at this time was a new ranger district headquarters, located immediately northeast of the historic fire tower.

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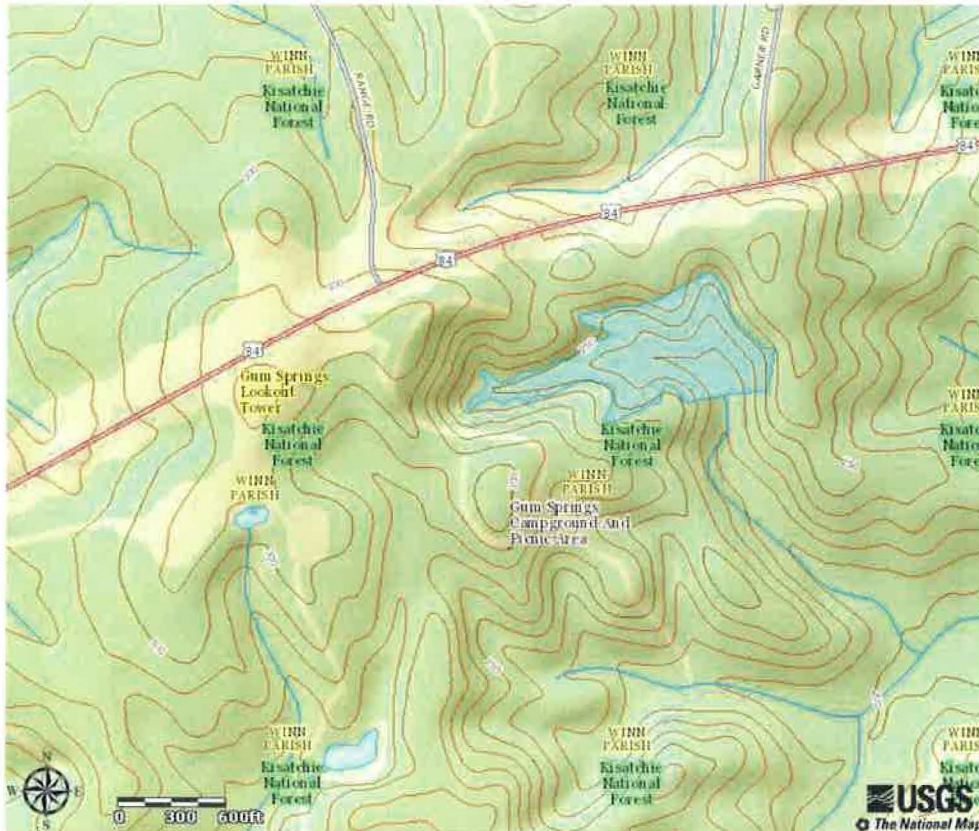
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Entry 2014 HALS Challenge: Documenting Landscapes of the New Deal



USGS Survey of Gum Springs Recreation Area.

At center right of map is indication of the reservoir constructed in 2006. The irregularly shaped west end of this body of water is the original swimming pool. The topography clearly indicates the ridge above the steeply sloped three-sided bowl surrounding the pool. The map also faintly indicates the location of park roads following the ridgeline, as well as the extensive paved area around the lookout tower, location of ranger district headquarters and maintenance facilities. At the site's highest elevation is the fire tower.

Image courtesy of USGS as obtained online from www.nationalmap.gov.



Hexagonal Picnic Shelter. Located on the south side of Swimming Pool with water in foreground. (Hartman, 2014).



Interior view of Hexagonal Picnic Shelter looking northeast toward Swimming Pool below. (Hartman, 2014).



Picnic Site on north side of Swimming Pool with Outdoor Fireplace and Sandstone Stairs down to water's edge. (Hartman, 2014).



Picnic Site with Outdoor Fireplace and Concrete Table on north side of Swimming Pool. (Hartman, 2014).



Ferruginous Sandstone Staircase. Located mid-slope west of the Swimming Pool looking towards the Parking Lot above. (Hartman, 2014).



Ferruginous Sandstone Retaining Wall supporting Picnic Site. (Hartman, 2014).



Hexagonal Picnic Shelter. This larger of the two shelter is located on the north side of the Swimming Pool seen in distance below. (Hartman, 2014).



Hexagonal Picnic Shelter from below with Ferruginous Sandstone Retaining Wall. (Hartman, 2014).



Gum Springs Lookout Tower. Located on small knoll several hundred yards west of Picnic Site. Base of tower is planted with non-native crape myrtles. Also seen are ancillary structures and Forest Service vehicles parked on the adjacent drive. (Hartman, 2014).



The intersection of Parish Road 501 and Telephone Road, approximately one mile north of the town of Calvin. While there is no evidence of the exact location of CCC Camp F6, it is probable that Telephone Road was constructed by the "Boys of the CCC." (Hartman, 2014).